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Promoting ‘Healthy Childhoods’ and Keeping Children ‘At Home’: Beninese Anti-Trafficking Policy in Times of Neoliberalism

Abstract

This paper offers the first examination of its kind of the content and nature of anti-trafficking policy as it is pursued in Benin. The paper draws on data gathered from policy and project documents and from interviews and participant observation with actors integral to the constitution of policy in (and with influence over) the Beninese anti-trafficking community. It attempts to bridge the oft-lamented gap between page and practice by conducting analysis not only of the *representation* of policy in text, but also of its lived manifestations in processes, interactions and structures. It argues that the various different actors that comprise Benin’s anti-trafficking pantheon seek to accomplish one fundamental goal – to protect children from trafficking – through two overarching strategies – the promotion of ‘healthy’ childhoods and the pre-emptive prevention of child movement. The paper examines each of the main strands of policy and concludes by offering a Foucauldian analysis of their operation. It thus fills a major gap in the academic understanding of anti-trafficking policy in the Beninese context.

Keywords

anti-trafficking policy, child migration, Benin, Foucault, governmentality

*‘People don’t realise how important our Ministry is –
we are here to change people’s behaviour’.*

(Interview with Salama, 11/3/10)¹

Introduction

In this paper, I will examine the content and nature of anti-trafficking policy as it is pursued in Benin. The paper draws on data gathered from policy and project documents and from interviews and participant observation conducted over 14 months with actors at every level of the Beninese anti-trafficking policy-chain. The paper attempts to bridge the oft-lamented gap between page and practice by conducting analysis not only of the *representation* of policy in text, but also of its lived manifestations in processes, interactions and structures (see, for example, McKee 2009). It demonstrates that, for all their differing institutional means and ends, the actors within this community seek to accomplish their shared goal – to protect children from trafficking – through two overarching strategies – the promotion of ‘healthy’ childhoods and the pre-emptive prevention of child movement. It examines step by step the main strands of policy as I understand them, and concludes by offering a Foucauldian analysis of their operation.

What is ‘Policy’?

Whilst political scientists often address the ‘why’ underpinning ‘policy’, economists examine its ‘cost’, and ethnographers engage with the ‘how’, most never explain what ‘policy’ actually consists of. Indeed, despite the voluminous literature addressing ‘policy’ from various perspectives across the academic spectrum, surprisingly few definitions of what ‘policy’ actually ‘is’ are available. Notwithstanding this definitional gap, however, certain central trends do appear to run through the few classifications that are available. In the Oxford English Dictionary, for example, we learn that ‘policy’ is ‘a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual’. Similarly, in a paper designed to answer exactly the question posed by this section, Torjmann (2005:4), while cycling through various different and conflicting formulations, determines that ‘policy’ ‘represents the end result of a decision as to how best to achieve a specific objective’, while David Mosse calls ‘policy’ a ‘process’, inherently linked to ‘practice’, but often divorced from its intended consequences (1999).

What these definitions seem to have in common is the notion that ‘policy’, as a positable and examinable reality (or ‘field’, in Bourdieu’s terms, 1977), exists independently of that to which it leads. Moreover, ‘policy’, such as it is understood above, consists of *goals, means and ends*, such that it can be termed *the course of action determined and embarked upon as the manner best to achieve a particular result*. The following section will discuss how this definition can be applied to tease out the core of anti-trafficking work in Benin.

¹ Where possible, all names of individuals, institutions and villages have been either changed or anonymised to protect the identity of informants. Details can be provided on request. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French are my own.

What am I Examining to Determine Anti-Trafficking Policy in Benin?

If 'policy' is *the course of action determined and embarked upon as the manner best to achieve a particular result*, examining anti-trafficking policy in Benin requires us, first, to identify which actors are involved in determining and embarking upon a course of anti-trafficking action, second, what constitute the main lines of that anti-trafficking action, and third, what is the particular end result towards which they work.

Taking these three components of the definition individually, undoubtedly, and perhaps intuitively, the major stated end result desired by all those actors involved in Beninese anti-trafficking policy is the 'protection of children', generally, and 'from trafficking' in particular. We can see this clearly from even a cursory examination of policy documentation, and such an assessment is supplemented by copious interview data. 'The major actors in the field of child protection', declares the National Anti-Child Trafficking Plan of Action (POA), include the Family and Justice Ministries, UNICEF and the ILO (MFE and ILO 2008:2). For these bodies, 'protecting children from trafficking' is a key goal. UNICEF Benin record it as one of their key activities on their website, as well as in their internal documentary LOGFRAME's. The Family Ministry's *raison d'être* is child protection – 'this is our overarching goal' declared one senior staff-member (Interview with Salama, 11/3/10) – and their work against trafficking forms a major component thereof. Similarly, the Justice Ministry has an office specifically focussing on child protection, which is central to work in this field, while the ILO's flagship project in the West African region, LUTRENA, is dedicated specifically to protecting children from trafficking.

In terms of which actors are involved in determining what should constitute Benin's national anti-trafficking strategy, the four bodies mentioned above naturally form the core. Indeed, the POA explicitly states that it was these bodies, amongst others, who came together to decide that an official strategy needed to be developed, in order to harmonise the interlinked and overlapping, yet officially un-coordinated, actions of the previous half-decade (MFE and ILO 2008:2). Interview and participant observation data confirm this and underline the wider centrality of these bodies. In one instance, I had been invited as a 'trafficking expert' to attend a major national workshop organised by an important INGO on child protection. In attendance were representatives of all the institutional actors involved in the field, including from these four bodies. Other participants included the 'state and pseudo-state agencies' (Interview with Alec, Senior IO Figure, Based in Benin, 23/2/10) that have been active in what they describe as 'the fight against trafficking' since its emergence in Benin at the start of the last decade, ranging from influential national and international NGOs to foreign donor agencies.

Can we identify what, if any, overarching strategy or course of action has been determined and embarked upon by these actors? I believe so. First because, since 2007, a national anti-trafficking POA has been in place, under the leadership of the Family Ministry, and in partnership with all the central players in the field (MFE and ILO 2007:2). My interviews and work experience tell me that this strategy, and the coordination that has been related to it, has seen a centralisation and a harmonisation between the efforts of the various bodies in the field, such that it is now legitimate to talk of an official and organised collective 'course of action'. Second, and equally

importantly, because while this official(ised) strategic coordination dates only to 2007 (even if early phases of discussion and planning took place in 2005/6), both the years after trafficking's explosion in Benin in 2001 and those after the POA in 2007 saw actions and trends in actions which were sufficiently similar, overlapping and collectively focussed to be identified as 'policy', in the terms laid out above.

What were these actions and trends? As I will elaborate more precisely in the following section, they involve *the pre-emptive protection of children from the exploitation that is inherent to the crime of trafficking by promoting 'healthy' childhoods and regulating, managing and ultimately preventing child migration away from the 'family home' for work*. This has involved multiple initiatives at multiple levels. Donor contributions range from behind-closed-door political advocacy to financial provisions; state contributions range from ratification of new laws to the extension of central power at the local level; while (I)NGO contributions include palliative care (in the form of shelters for victims), help at the level of individual families with schooling, and widespread 'sensitisation'. Though each institution necessarily has different 'outputs', different 'vertical' discursive and practical institutional fields within which they operate, and different methodologies, their work has consistently contributed to the establishment of complimentary means to achieve the same end – in other words, a policy. It is to the content of this policy that the paper will now turn.

What are the components of Anti-Trafficking Policy in Benin?

In this section I will offer an examination of the multiple strands of Beninese anti-trafficking policy. As will become apparent, the majority of initiatives fall into the category of protection from trafficking by *prevention*, while the final category is concerned with post-facto protection.

The Law

Undoubtedly the major plank of Beninese anti-trafficking policy is and has been the Law Regulating the Movement of Minors and Suppressing the Traffic in Children (Loi N° 2006-04). Though only given Presidential assent in 2006 (with accompanying Decrees of Application finalised in 2009), actors across the anti-trafficking spectrum in (and with influence over) Benin pushed, cajoled and lobbied for the drafting and adoption of such a law almost immediately the issue exploded onto the national scene in 2001.

Back in 2005, when I first worked in Benin, NGO representatives with whom I collaborated repeatedly bemoaned the lack of necessary anti-trafficking legislation in the country. Their complaints were echoed around the same time by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, while various international and bilateral representatives present in the country had been extirpating the value of legislation since much earlier. When discussing the eventual adoption of the law with colleagues between 2007 and 2010, it became clear quite how invested the Beninese government's partners were in such an event. Cecile, a senior donor representative working in Benin, explained that donors and (I)NGOs had come together well before the Beninese government gave its assent to draw up a draft text for legislation (Interview with Cecile, 17/12/9). JR and Alexia, both high-level INGO

representatives working on Benin, explained that one donor and one UN agency in particular had placed massive pressure on the government to ‘get a law on the books’ as quickly as possible (Interview with JR, 5/6/9; Interview with Alexia, 1/9/7). The donor had, according to various interviewees, threatened the Beninese government with a cut in funding if such legislation were not forthcoming, while the UN agency had, according to its then representative, pulled together figures from all the Western embassies, bilateral agencies and major INGOs in Cotonou in order to get them to support these threats and calls for legal change (Interview with Phil, 9/11/9).

That the adoption of the law was seen as such a central pillar of anti-trafficking protection more broadly, and such a central component of each individual entity’s anti-trafficking strategy in particular, can be seen from the way it has subsequently been represented. The US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) reports went from lambasting Benin’s lack of a suitable legal framework during the early part of the last decade to congratulating ‘[t]he Government of Benin [for its] solid efforts to combat trafficking through law enforcement efforts’ (USDS 2007:65). Similarly, on its website, UNICEF ‘hailed the adoption of a new law to combat child trafficking in the Republic of Benin’, claiming that it ‘will strengthen the legal framework surrounding the efforts to combat child trafficking and will facilitate the implementation of activities led in this field by the government and various partners’².

As for the content of the law itself, it seeks to both establish norms around which kinds of child movement (and economic activity) are legitimate and to ban and suppress all others. In this regard, it is significant to note that the law’s full title refers to ‘*Regulating the Movement of Minors*’ more broadly, and not merely to ‘*Suppressing the Traffic in Children*’.

What does this regulation entail? In Article 7, the law establishes that children cannot legally be displaced within the borders of the country unless accompanied either by a direct parent or guardian or with the consent of a local government official. As the law and its related decrees go on to explain, this consent will only be forthcoming if a number of conditions are met. First, a family ‘placing’ a child must have all the child’s papers in order. Second, they must have enough money to pay for the child’s return. And third, they must be able to demonstrate that the child’s relocation is for the purpose of school attendance or for an official apprenticeship in a state-sanctioned sector. Crucially, Article 14 establishes that it is illegal for a child to relocate independently of her legal guardians, and empowers the state to forcibly return the child to her family in cases where she has done so. In similar fashion, Article 4 establishes that relocation for ‘exploitation’ constitutes trafficking and is thus illegal, irrespective of any consent offered, with exploitation taken to comprise all that one finds in the Palermo Protocol definition of trafficking *and* any work that is liable to damage the ‘health, security, or morality’ of the child. As per the ILO anti-child labour framework in operation in the country, the privilege of defining precisely what constitutes such work is reserved for the state.

One of the prime goals of such heavy-handed legislation was to give Benin’s law enforcement agencies a platform for both arresting and discouraging the traffickers that are seen as so central to the apparently widespread child trafficking in the

² http://www.unicef.org/media/media_30926.html

country. From the head office of his IO, Fulani lamented that too often traffickers are able to 'get away with their crimes' and argued that governments must use these kinds of laws to prosecute and establish a deterrent (Interview with Fulani, 28/5/9). Toto, a very senior figure within Beninese law enforcement, concurred, declaring that when the government wants to stop something, a law is needed, and from there 'we can hit the crime hard' (Interview with Toto, 3/3/10). An example of what such hard-hitting looks like on the ground came in an interview with two men whose brother had been arrested when accompanying his nieces on a journey to another brother's house in Gabon. Unaware of the legal changes, the man was arrested as a trafficker and, according to a colleague present during our interview, was now in prison (Interview with Winston; Interview with Wilis, 19/8/7).

Such 'traffickers' are clearly not the only target of this law, however. When offering his opinion as to its wider functioning, Alec, a Beninese national working for an IO in Cotonou, declared that movement control and prevention of child movement more generally were central. 'We need a return to the Revolution³', he shouted, 'all movement should be controlled' (Interview with Alec, 23/2/10). When I sought clarification with a senior government official over whether such anti-movement tendencies were widely shared, or whether the anti-movement tone of the law had simply been the result of judicial heavy-handedness, this was the exchange we had:

'Neil: Is [the law] practicable though? How can a poor, illiterate villager get together the money and documents necessary to legally place his child?

Deg: That's the point. It isn't practicable. The goal is to ban placement. You can't tell the difference between placement and trafficking anyway, so we need to ban it all'.

(Interview with Deg, 10/3/10)

Cooperation with Nigeria

Intricately related to the promulgation and implementation of Benin's anti-trafficking law was the signing and operationalising of its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Nigeria. Again, Phil explained:

'Nigeria was a big issue for us, because we realised that Nigeria was the major destination for Beninese kids. We therefore needed to establish a partnership with them. UNICEF convinced both governments to get together and have regular meetings on trafficking. We wanted to develop an MOU on the issue, which we eventually did. I was the facilitator for the meetings and chaired all the sessions, which included ministry people, civil society, etc...Ultimately, the agreement was signed in Cotonou at the Foreign Ministry in 2006. It's a very good document, stating the multi-level cooperation that is to take place between the countries, from police, to border officials to the BPM and NAPTIP⁴. Each country also developed

³ By 'revolution', Alec means the authoritative rule of Mathieu Kérékou, officially termed a Marxist-Leninist Revolution. Movement was heavily policed during this period.

⁴ The two police agencies responsible for anti-trafficking work in Benin and Nigeria respectively.

concrete joint and separate plans of action, including border sensitisation. That component of the work was developed as a result of our previous surveys. Ministers and UNICEF staff all went to border villages and told people that the law had changed and that behaviour must therefore also change. They told people that there were severe punishments for transgression, including 25 years in jail. Some people have in fact now been arrested. We got data on it, which the US were really keen on getting and publishing’.

(Interview with Phil, 9/11/9)

Phil’s description and assessment were echoed by Dibi, Benin’s most senior civil servant responsible for the country’s anti-trafficking work. In expounding on the various strands of Benin’s anti-trafficking strategy, he explained:

‘Another major component of what we do is international agreements, particularly with Nigeria. We have lots of meetings to address our coordination, develop and check the implementation of the joint plans of action. This is what we renew each year, and did so only a month ago. As part of this, we have even set up a brigade specifically to stop trans-national traffickers and to monitor and if necessary shut the borders. This brigade is composed of police, customs officers and communities themselves in order to strengthen borders with Nigeria, Niger and Togo. The Nigerians have set up the same thing on their side, on the Porto-Novo road’.

(Interview with Dibi, 10/3/10)

Further interviews and documentary analysis confirm this picture. One colleague of mine, who represents a civil society presence on both the coordination committee for the MOU and in the ground-level ‘sensitisation’ teams, explained that in practice it is all about harmonising institutional responses at the political level, providing support for the expansion of border controls and persuading border communities to desist from the mobility that the policy establishment see as so problematic.

The Village Committees

Perhaps the major component in the state and pseudo-state anti-trafficking arsenal has been the establishment of what were first denominated ‘village vigilance committees’, and what have subsequently become known as ‘village child protection committees’. Abidi was the IO employee responsible for establishing the very first of these, in an initiative that partnered the state, two influential IOs, two particularly active donors and a collection of local, sub-contracted NGOs. He explained:

‘This was an innovative thing for us. They were good and people came from all over to see them in action. At the start it was a result of the willingness of citizens to help vulnerable kids. They were volunteers and helped us and NGOs. [We] told them to organise and that it is within the community that you can find an answer to the problem. They were very informal at the start and then we decided to spread the model around the country as we went to villages to sensitise people. We tried to form committees everywhere. We

got influential people involved to convince parents not to let kids leave. When they had been sensitised, we built on that...Now if I evaluate I can't say that they were totally informal as the state got involved and worked with the communities via the local authorities. The Mayor helps, while the state and [our agency] sustain them materially'.

(Interview with Abidi, 12/1/10)

His narration was paralleled by Dibi, the civil servant we encountered earlier, whose words reveal that the committees represent, capillary-like, the state's arm in the village:

'We are very strongly supported by UNICEF, especially in the sending zones, where we've set up committees and strengthened communal authorities. Last year, for example, 38 village committees were set up in Donga and Atacora alone, taking the total to over 1400 throughout the country. These are a key initiative, because they permit the communities to participate. The DEA⁵ sets them up and UNICEF pays for them. The CPS' manage and coordinate them at the local level, while NGOs are involved to help with the job...[They] receive training and equipment, but no money. ...[Their goal] is to stop kids leaving, because leaving home is what leads to trafficking. They therefore liaise with the local police and the CPS, working together to prevent departure'.

(Interview with Dibi, 10/3/10)

Though official documentation points to a wide variety of tasks performed by, and goals worked for, the village committees, these interviews, interviews with committee members, and myriad unpublished material relating to their operation clearly suggest that their major objective is to pre-emptively protect children by thwarting their movement. An important internal IO document from 2006 thus reveals that the emphasis in activities is squarely placed on 'community surveillance [regarding movement]', while an allegedly suppressed consultant's report offered precisely the same conclusion, arguing that most of the work they do is 'anti-movement' (Interview with Miguel, former Senior INGO Figure, 31/4/9; Botte and UNICEF 2005:16). This was echoed by numerous committee members in villages where I conducted primary research. Charley, head of his committee, said that each village *quartier* has an official who is tasked with 'watching over' child departures (Interview with Charley, Zelele Village, 19/4/10), while Cliff, also a committee head, explained that the committees were 'vigilance bodies to stop children leaving' (Interview with Cliff, Sehere Village, 7/4/10).

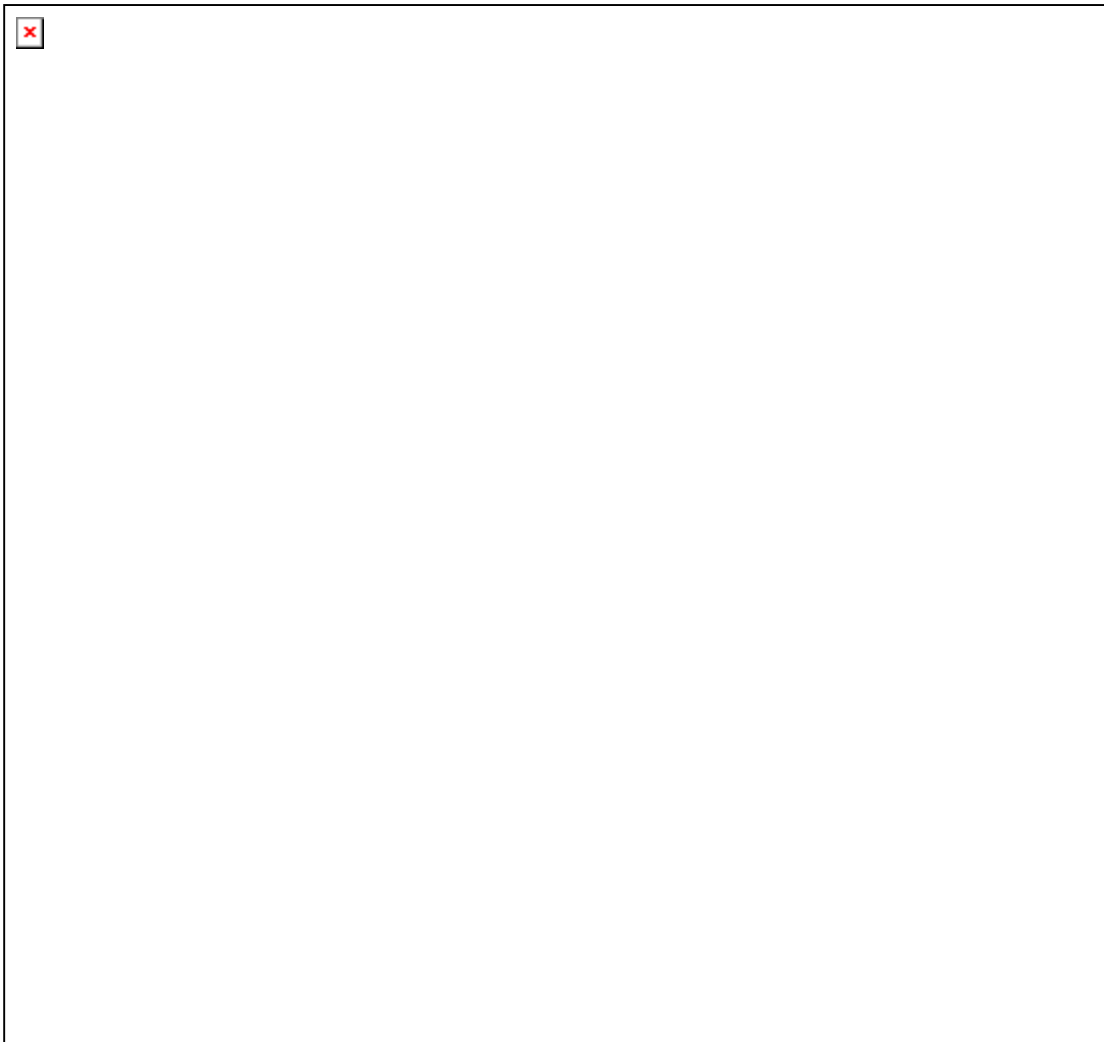
Sensitisation and 'Responsibilisation'

Though the Beninese government (and many institutional partners) would apparently like to be able to compel the stifling of child movement as widely as possible, policy-makers are acutely aware that the resources for total surveillance and enforcement are lacking, and thus that a degree of individual self-policing is necessary. The key

⁵ A branch of the Family Ministry.

watch-words in this self-policing drive are ‘sensitisation’ and ‘responsibilisation’. In examining how important such work is to the wider anti-trafficking panoply, it is noteworthy that every single official document relating to anti-trafficking policy in Benin features ‘sensitisation’ as one of the key project activities undertaken or to be undertaken. IO reports show ‘sensitisation’ to have been central to anti-trafficking efforts every year for the last decade, each of the organisations I have worked with have used ‘sensitisation’ or ‘responsibilisation’ as a core plank of their activities, the Government’s POA lists ‘sensitisation’ as one of its major strategic recommendations (MFE and ILO 2008:26), and the National Study concludes much the same (MFE et al. 2007).

What does this entail? Individual activities vary. They include widespread public information and advocacy messages broadcast on national radio, on national television and in road-side poster campaigns. They include NGO staff heading into villages to bring together inhabitants and ‘inform’ them of the dangers of ‘x’ or ‘y’. Or they include the development and dissemination of material such as *Ana, Bazil and The Trafficker*, a massively widely-diffused ‘sensitisation film’, which was rolled out around the country using mobile cinemas and sub-contracted NGOs. Below is a series of photographs taken from one such screening⁶:



⁶ Source: <http://www.c-n-a.org/news42.htm>

What is the dominant content of these sensitisation and responsabilisation drives? There are two main strands. The first revolves around creating ‘modern’, ‘aware’, ‘responsible’ parents, attentive to their children’s needs as rights-bearers and able to provide them with ‘healthy childhoods’. In this regard, Banda, a donor representative in Cotonou, encapsulated the general trend of such work when saying that his agency funds efforts that focus on ‘evolving peasant mentalities’ (Interview with Banda, 2/3/10), while at one major child protection workshop I attended, I repeatedly heard how vital these efforts were for helping ‘social norms evolve’. Such opinions found favour also with Idyl, a donor figure in Cotonou, who explained that key to all her work was the notion that parents abdicating their ‘responsibilities’ needed to be ‘responsibilised’:

Neil: Is your goal to keep children at home?

Idyl: Yes, absolutely.

Neil: Why?

Idyl: Our understanding of the fight against trafficking is that local development and family responsabilisation are key.

Neil: So what would policy look like in your ideal world?

Idyl: It would teach parents how to parent, because it’s not easy. We’d get rid of bad practices and build on good ones. We’d get kids in school...’

(Interview with Idyl, 1/3/10)

Idyl’s words here point to the second main strand of what responsabilisation/sensitisation means in practice – reformulating peasant opinions so that people ‘understand’ child movement as negative, and thus that they self-police by keeping their children at home. Abidi and Dibi indicated as much in their descriptions of the work of the village committees. Celestin, a local government official responsible for the commune in which I conducted much of my ground-level research, said much the same. Asked if he was involved in any such ‘sensitisation’, he replied in the affirmative, explaining that his staff, NGOs and the committees with which he works frequently go to backwater villages to describe ‘why leaving is bad’ (Interview with Celestin, 6/4/10). Such claims were echoed both by village committee members and by ordinary villagers I interviewed. Both Charley and Cliff, mentioned above, highlighted this kind of sensitisation as key to what they do (Interview with Cliff, Sehere Village, 7/4/10; Interview with Charley, Zelele Village, 19/4/10), while a group from a neighbouring village claimed unanimously that they repeatedly hear the message that leaving is a major problem, at school, from white people, and from NGOs who come to ‘sensitise’ (Interview with Group 12, Atomé Village, 14/5/10).

School Promotion

When asking policy-makers the question, ‘in an ideal world, how would you deal with child trafficking?’, the predominant response was ‘by getting children into school’. Similarly, when discussing with policy-makers what childhood *should* look like, a frequent refrain was that ‘school is where children should be’. This is reflected in the dominant ILO anti-child labour platform adopted by Benin, and indeed in the related legislation that mandates schooling for all under-14s. It should perhaps be no surprise, therefore, that the promotion and expansion of schooling represents a key target for

the anti-trafficking community, with interviews and policy documents revealing its strategic centrality.

In discussions with one donor, for example, I heard flatly that, instead of an anti-trafficking law, what Benin actually needs is a law (and related enforcement) that obliges all children to attend school, and for this schooling to be truly free (Interview with Idyl, 1/3/10). Veronica, a local government official, explained that a key strand of the work she does is educating people about the importance of schooling, particularly for girls. UNICEF have been especially supportive of this, she stated, including by funding sensitisation, schools and school places, all of which have led to an increase in enrolment (Interview with Veronica, 7/4/10). The POA also supports Veronica's position, citing the correlation between being out of school and being trafficked and thus recommending an increase in schooling as one of the major axes through which the country can tackle the crime (MFE and ILO 2008:66).

Getting children into school thus represents at once both a key *end* for the anti-trafficking and child protection community in Benin and a key *means* for achieving the specific goal of preventing trafficking. On the one hand, school is 'where children should be' (as opposed to away from home working), and so ensuring that that is where they are is crucial. On the other, having them in school is believed to prevent them from departing for work, and ultimately ending up in situations of exploitation and trafficking. As the POA states, children in school are less likely to be trafficked. Or, in the words of Abidi, good schools have been proven to prevent child departures, so their establishment is now encouraged (Interview with Abidi, 12/1/10). Deg concurred:

'The major strategy is to promote mass schooling, especially for girls, as we've noted that girls are the most trafficked and that trafficking decreases when kids are in school. The two major goals of schooling are therefore a) to make it harder for kids to leave, because if they are in school people will notice that they're gone, and b) to ensure that they have something to do, because the kids that leave are often the kids that are at home without an activity'.

(Interview with Deg, 10/3/10)

Family Planning and Birth Registration

Similarly understood as both means and desirable end is the drive by Benin's anti-trafficking and wider child protection community for comprehensive family planning and birth registration in the country.

In the case of family planning, BØRNEfonden's recent assessment of their anti-trafficking work in Benin encapsulates an understanding that transcends the policy community: much more work is needed on 'causes' of trafficking, such as large family sizes and the lack of family planning (2009:38). The logic behind such thinking is that large families are generally poor, it is poor families whose children work, and thus a reduction of family sizes will be useful for preventing the labour exploitation that constitutes trafficking. In the words of Jemima:

‘We need to make sure people have less kids. Families should only have as many as they can afford. We cant have people having kids just to then send them off to be trafficked’.

(Interview with Jemima, 17/3/10)

Similarly Cynthia, a fellow local government official:

‘It is absolutely essential to reduce family sizes. Two children should already be a maximum, because resources are so limited for child support’.

(Interview with Cynthia, 38/8/7)

It should not be surprising that campaigns to this effect have already been initiated and are currently expanding. My research in villages in fact revealed that the ‘have less children so that your children can have a proper childhood’ message has long since reached ground level. A mixed group of adult villagers told me that they frequently heard how important it was to have less children, ‘both on the radio and in the health centres’ (Interview with Group 8, Tenga Village, 9/5/10), while a group of adult males explained that ‘the state has started to talk about birth control and family planning here, trying to get us to reduce the number of children we have’ (Group 2 Interview, Southern Benin, 12/4/10).

With regards to birth registration, although the chain of causality is not articulated quite as clearly as it is with large family size, the lack of total birth registration is generally assumed to represent a ‘cause’ of trafficking in Benin, and thus it is believed that registering births must form a preventive policy response. In the country’s POA, for example, we read that:

‘In 2001, it was estimated that a third of Beninese children had not had their births registered with the state. These children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, because they cannot be expected to receive healthcare and education, or be watched over by these services. Without an official national identity, resulting from this lack of official documentation, these children are often a trafficker’s first victims’.

(MFE and ILO 2008:21)

Hence, in one study of the work of village committees, we learn that pushing villagers to register every birth represents a top-level priority (Botte and UNICEF 2005:17). Similarly, in the National Study, we are told that expanding birth registration constitutes a major recommendation for winning the fight against trafficking, with 27.1% of all bodies involved in ‘prevention’ already engaged in precisely this effort (MFE and UNICEF 2007:77).

The Fight Against Poverty and ‘IGAs’

Since poverty is widely assumed to be at the root of much trafficking, it should be expected that tackling ‘poverty’ forms a cornerstone of the fight against the crime. On paper at least, for many bodies involved in the field, it does. The National Study

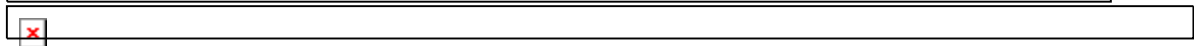
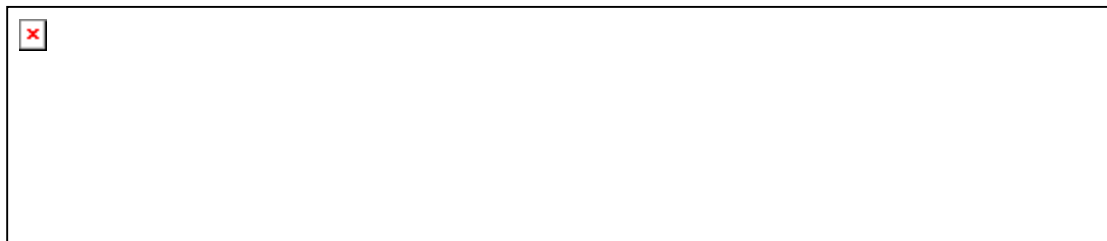
trumpets ‘fighting poverty’ as one of the main ways Benin must address trafficking (MFE and UNICEF 2007:77), while the POA highlights that this is central to national efforts and is being undertaken transversally through certain measures that comprise part of Benin’s Poverty Reduction Strategy elaborated with the World Bank (MFE and ILO 2008:65-7). In similar vein, Jayjay, a donor government officer working in Benin, explained that while more was needed in this regard, we must not forget that money is being donated and ‘transversal’ contributions are made through finance for agricultural projects, infrastructure and ‘other structural issues’ (Interview with Jayjay, 2/4/10)

Jayjay’s mention of structure here is significant, since it points to the way in which the ‘tackling poverty’ component of anti-trafficking policy tends to play out in practice. Though certain corollary institutional initiatives do work on large-scale (or ‘structural’) issues related to poverty, most specifically anti-trafficking poverty reduction efforts target what little resources they have at individuals, families or small communities, predominantly in the form of time-bound donations or support for ‘Income Generating Activities’ (IGAs). In order to illustrate how this approach functions, I will draw on a case study of the ILO’s LUTRENA project, which was the organisation’s flagship anti-trafficking initiative in West Africa throughout much of the 2000’s, and which centred on a ‘Poverty Reduction Strategy’. I have chosen this as an example because I believe it encapsulates the way poverty is ‘tackled’ within anti-trafficking policy more widely, with the analysis below mirroring ones I have seen and myself offered elsewhere. These extracts come from an independent ILO evaluation of LUTRENA’s success at its conclusion in 2007 (ILO-IPEC 2007:v-17).

The document begins with an introduction to the LUTRENA project:



Next we learn what exactly LUTRENA comprises:



The importance of poverty as a cause of child trafficking – ‘CT’ – is made clear in the paragraph below:



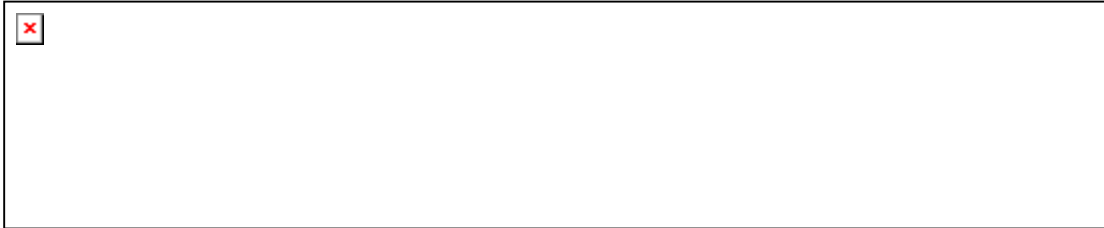
Elaborating further, we see how this relates to LUTRENA's use of targeted 'Action Program's' (including IGAs):



Unfortunately, such targeting is not, in the view of the evaluators, quite as successful as it would have been hoped:



The evaluator's conclusion is one which, in my experience, is shared by analysts of such interventions throughout Benin. Their final word:

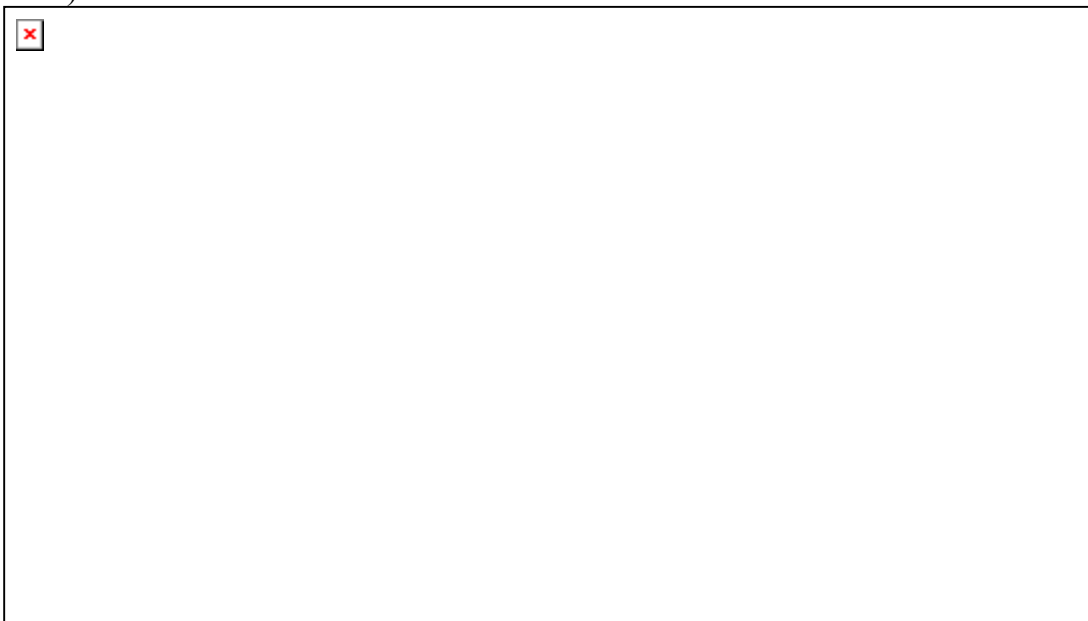


Protection

Thus far, all of the policy strands examined in this paper have fallen into the category of trafficking *prevention*. In this final sub-section, I shall examine how the anti-trafficking panoply seek to protect those who have already been trafficked.

Though there are some who seek to intervene directly and remove children from working situations deemed equivalent to trafficking, protection efforts in this field revolve predominantly around the funding and running of shelters for 'rescued' children and the re-insertion of children returned from 'situations of trafficking'. I have worked with two major organisations engaged in this effort – one national, one international, and both vital pillars of the anti-trafficking and child protection establishment – and it is on the basis of the in-depth participant observation garnered from these experiences that I write.

Generally, all of the major actors involved in the anti-trafficking field contribute in some way to the protection of victims. Major donors, from the state, through IOs to bilaterals, limit their contributions to financing, but it is their money which pays operational overheads. Thus, in the INGO shelter in which I worked, for example, UNICEF had for many years footed the bill as part of its anti-trafficking protection volet, while in the extract below we see the US paying over \$150,000 to Caritas to fund that organisation's vocational training centres for former victims (USDS-TIP: 2005):



While the major institutional players pay, then, it is the ‘service provider’ national and international NGOs that run protection operations on a daily basis. Usually, this will involve a mixture of activities. At times, long-term shelter is offered and centres function almost as orphanages. At others, shelters provide shorter-term rehabilitation, including of course food and accommodation, but also psycho-social support, until a child is ready to be ‘reinserted’. Sometimes, such reinsertion is not necessary, and a child will be supported ‘en milieu ouvert’ – literally, ‘out in the open’ – while living with his or her family.

A major component of all these different means of protection is support or preparation for the child’s growth into an independent adulthood. Without fail, and in line with the normative, legal framework around childhood in Benin, this consists of one of two things. Either children will be schooled or will receive small bursaries (be they financial or in kind, with school materials) in order to remain in school. Or they will receive a professional apprenticeship in one of a number of different fields. In my experience, the options from which children ‘choose’ these apprenticeships are very narrow, and remain highly gendered. Thus, boys will almost invariably be trained as mechanics or craftsmen, while girls will, as one INGO employee lamented, ‘have either hairdressing or sewing!’ (Interview with Alexia, 1/9/7).

Analysis and Discussion

The above discussion has offered a comprehensive overview of all the major policy actions undertaken by the various different institutional actors operating within Benin’s anti-trafficking field. Despite their different means of contributing to the shared goal of protecting children from trafficking, it should be clear that the two dominant trends running across the gamut of anti-trafficking initiatives are 1) pre-emptively preventing the migration that is seen to lead to children being trafficked, and 2) promoting ‘healthy’ childhoods that involve children being in school, staying at home with their families and avoiding work.

In this the final section of the paper, I will move beyond this observation and will suggest that this dominant approach to anti-trafficking can be profitably analysed through the lens of Michel Foucault’s work, notably through his concepts of ‘disciplinary’ and ‘productive’ power, each of which combine against the backdrop of neoliberalism to produce neoliberal subject(ivities). Though space does not allow for a comprehensive elaboration of Foucault’s scholarship, I will briefly clarify what I understand by these concepts, before applying them to the policies depicted in the previous section.

In his early research, Foucault elaborated the notion of ‘discipline’, which he took to refer to the juridical establishment of what is and is not acceptable conduct, enforced by the compulsion of punishments which accrue to deviance (Foucault 1976 and 1977). Intricately linked to this notion of discipline was that of ‘production’. As Foucault explains, “[Power] needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body” (1984b:119), generating *self-governing, self-disciplining* individual subject(ivities) through mechanisms of consciousness formation. Crucially, these two means of conducting conduct are intricately interwoven. As Foucault states:

‘I think it is indisputable, or hardly disputable, that discipline normalizes... Disciplinary normalization consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary normalization consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is incapable of conforming to the norm’ (2007:56).

Discipline and production, then, go hand in hand. A norm of behaviour is established (or crystallized), and part of its enforcement rests on encouraging its widespread internalisation, either through fear or through persuasion, such that individuals come themselves to reflect and mirror that dominant norm.

In the contemporary world, Foucault argues, the dominant model of societal governance is neoliberalism and thus the dominant mirror reflection/incarnation of that model at the level of the individual is the neoliberal ‘homo economicus’ (1979:401). Tracing the genesis of this model in his lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault argued that the innovation of early liberalism as a political, economic and social philosophy for governance was its acceptance that no authority could effectively manage every individual in every contingent situation, and thus that government should adopt a mode of laissez-faire stewardship that allowed the ‘invisible hand’ of the market to drive the world forward, but which tried, like a good father managing his family, to prudently manage what resources it has for the common good (Burchell 1991:18/92). The current version of this philosophy involves minimization of state participation in the ‘market’, the acceptance of distributions of resources and power as pre-facto realities not to be interfered with (Mitchell 2004:389), and thus the placing of responsibility for economic well-being solely on the shoulders of the individual economic agent – in Foucault’s terms the ‘homo economicus’, whose duty it is to maximize himself as a vehicle of capital and self-advancement (Burchell 1990:36-40).

How may these concepts apply to anti-trafficking policy in Benin? In the case of discipline, by far the major emphasis of Benin’s anti-trafficking strategy has clearly been on the forced reduction of child movement as a pre-emptive tool to prevent eventual exploitation and thus trafficking. Child movement is treated as almost synonymous with trafficking, and the anti-trafficking establishment therefore seeks to suppress that movement, using the full (and enhanced) power of the state to do so. This is evidenced in various coercive measures, including in the establishment of border patrols, cooperation with Nigeria on the surveillance of trans-border movements, the various stipulations of the ‘anti-trafficking law’ and the establishment of the village committees. Such measures constitute discipline in two key ways. On the one hand, they involve the use of state force to compel obedience by suppressing behaviour that has been identified as unacceptable. On the other, the very theatrical nature of law-enforcement or border sensitisation messages which warn of 25 years in prison represent a performative push which suggests that fear is being employed as a tactic to enforce compliance.

The fear-factor is also important as a tool of productive power, since its goal is clearly to encourage citizens to internalise and own self-policing anti-movement messages. Production goes far beyond both fear and anti-movement here though. Anti-

trafficking policy in Benin does not seek solely to hammer or scare Beninese citizens into the sedentary shape desired by the establishment; it also seeks to mould them, *through widespread persuasion and encouragement*, to take on the form the establishment prefers and subsequently maintain, of their own accord, its correlated behaviour. This is of course evidenced in the massive importance of ‘sensitisation’ efforts that aim to create ‘healthy childhoods’ by convincing parents that children ‘should’ be at home, that family sizes need reducing, and that school is the ‘right’ place for children to be.

More significant perhaps than this, however, is the dominant type of individual anti-trafficking policy seeks to create through the promotion of these protective healthy childhoods. If we recall what activities are viewed and pushed as legitimate for children in this policy world (be that through sensitisation, legal norms or ‘reinsertion’ after having been trafficked), it is notable that options are restricted to either school or a professional, pre-work apprenticeship. Similarly, in dealing with poverty, anti-trafficking policy’s dominant approach is to target the individual – by promoting skills-based IGAs. What does this mean? It means that through education and skill development, the anti-trafficking establishment is working towards the creation of self-sufficient, responsible and independent economic actors able to survive in the world of the market – in other words, the ‘homo economicus’.

The neoliberal underpinnings of this approach are apparent. In ‘fighting poverty’ through the vehicle of individual responsabilisation, neither the Beninese state nor any of its partners seek to modify the structural realities of the market economy; rather, in classic neo/liberal fashion, they leave the market *untrammelled by the hand of state intervention*. The neoliberalism of Beninese anti-trafficking policies goes beyond this however. While migration is generally demonised within the policy establishment, many policy-makers accept that not all migrant children necessarily end up in situations of trafficking, yet they target all migrant children’s movement as a pre-emptive strategy to protect those that they believe do. Why is this? Quite simply, it is because it is viewed as a cost-effective means of ensuring protection.

As Foucault noted, neo/liberalism promotes the belief that a government must operate in a fiscally prudent fashion, making basic financial trade-off decisions in the way a household head does with a family budget, *while accepting its financial limitations (and the structures which underpin those) as fact*. What this means is that, despite claims to the contrary, governments including Benin’s do not create policies which are optimal, but which are affordable. As such, in one discussion with Sandra, an INGO staffer based in Cotonou, I asked why the state and its partners did not fight exploitation in general, as opposed to exploitation solely in the context of movement. Her response was telling. Though admitting that many believe this would be ideal, she lamented that ‘it is difficult in Africa and in poor countries in general to fight against exploitation because you need a lot of money to do so’ (Interview with Sandra, 1/9/7). Her answer was paralleled by Didi, a Ministry of Justice official, who admitted that ‘we would love to reinforce labour inspectorates, but we lack the means to do so. Indeed the whole state lacks the means since it was rolled back in recent decades’ (Interview with Didi, 3/4/10). Perhaps most tellingly of all are the words of Celestin, a communal level government official, with whom I had the following exchange:

‘Neil: Why don’t we work to stop exploitation instead of movement?

Celestin: That’s impossible. It’s too difficult...It’s easier to stop people moving’.

(Interview with Celestin, 6/4/10)

Conclusion

Celestin’s words are worth bearing in mind, since they encapsulate much of what this paper has tried to demonstrate. Drawing on data from interviews, participant observation and relevant documentation obtained from across the anti-trafficking spectrum, I have outlined the major contours of policy in this field and have suggested that the central thrust of each is to protect children from trafficking by promoting ‘healthy childhoods’ and pre-emptively preventing/regulating child movement. As such, I have suggested that policy represents a classical example of disciplinary and productive power and that through these vehicles it seeks to create neoliberal subject(ive)ities against the framing backdrop of neoliberalism. What we have here, therefore, is not simple protection policy; rather it is protection policy at a payable price.

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